

Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Association Inc.

# What's flying around....



## Editorial: Road Allowances: Considerations

Road Allowance means land held by Saskatchewan which was at any time intended for use by the general public for the passage of vehicles, whether actually used for that purpose or not.

Migration route may be defined as the total area of land or water that a migratory species inhabits, stays in temporarily, crosses or overflies, at any time on its normal migration route. A migration corridor is the hypothetical connection between two places. It may be thought of as a narrow strip of land across previously foreign territory.

Consider what a migration corridor might do. It can enhance, enable, shelter, protect, facilitate and assist. What might a road allowance corridor do for migrating species? It could provide places to rest and/or sources of food. A corridor would also be particularly beneficial for non-migratory species that are active in winter (such as deer and grouse).

There are many species other than animals that can none the less, migrate (although, comparatively, at a much slower rate). Nematodes, arthropods, protozoa, fungi, bacteria and plants may serve as examples.

Consider that some species may not only exist along road allowances but that they may also migrate out. Some species travel beneath the surface via roots and sometimes via a symbiotic relationship referred to as mycorrhiza. Some species (bees) fly. Some (beetles) crawl. Most landowners, because of derived benefits, are aware but many folks seldom consider these species and symbiotic relationships among species (mycorrhiza).

Joyce Muir: Bluebird Banding Assistant



Photo: YFBTA member Karen Muir

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Benefits accrue directly to tiny life forms (microbes or biota) that live below the surface in the soil. They, through their life processes, enhance soil health, adding organic matter.

Research has revealed that many beetle species (Carib beetle) out-migrate. Beetles are effective predators of some noted pest species, among them aphids and mites. Some species of wasps are predators of caterpillars.

A number of species bring benefits, at no cost, to landowners. Some have also been shown to add nutrients. There are additional agricultural benefits due to soil biology and due to soil chemistry. Healthier soil translates into enhanced plant growth and increased numbers of plants (Landowners have effective ways of dealing with unwanted plants (weeds) and animals such as insects).

Recent studies are revealing that soil is healthier and desired yields are higher in areas adjacent to places where native plant species remain undisturbed. This type of habitat can sustain many species. It can sustain symbiotic relationships and desirable chemical processes (all the while increasing the organic component of soil (soil health). Consider that a landowner may be fortunate to have land adjacent to a road allowance.

Consider that Road Allowance Corridors are safe and welcoming places to walk, to photograph and/or to enjoy solitude. They are spaces where biodiversity can be sustained under the watchful eyes of voluntary stewards (Rural Municipality Councils). Consider engaging with biodiversity.

### Jeepers Creepers

Jean Knoll

My west facing windows provide a wonderful world for the amateur bird watcher in me. The first winter in our home, I thought it must be time for an optometrist visit when the bark on the pine tree seemed to be moving. On closer inspection, I noticed this bird - small in stature, with a rounded white belly, speckled brown and white feathering, and distinctive longer tail feathers - moving down the bark of the tree. His beak, beautifully arched with a thin black appearance, pierced the bark with laser like precision.

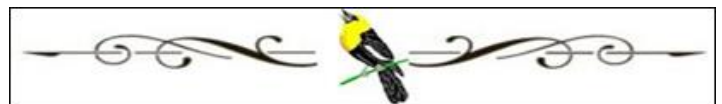
I had to observe for a few minutes to see if he was successful in finding food. Imagine my surprise to note that he was not finding food at all, but was instead placing sunflower seeds behind the bark. Consulting both my bird book and national geographic.com, I was pleased to see we had a "Certhia americana" -the Brown Creeper.

This bird is elusive in the spring, summer, and fall months. However, when late November arrives, there he is - each year of the 24 we have been in this house.



Photo: Bing Images.com 2023

During the winter of 2022 - 2023, I was pleased to see not one, but two of these industrious feathered friends - one smaller and more lively in her ringed dance down the trunk of our majestic pine trees. They are visual reminders of the cycle of the seasons, to be judicious with food storage, and to be resilient in preparing for our harsh winters. If these little birds can make rings around the tree, I can at the very least keep my feeders clean and well stocked for their winter visits.



### Letter to the editor

Another fantastic newsletter (2023: Dec. Issue 3).

YFBTA does an amazing job in collection of such interesting observations. Undoubtedly, the YFBTA is one of our most active and informed societies.

Nature Saskatchewan's Lorne Scott

## Road Allowance Project

YFBTA member Arden Bradford

February of 2024 will be the second anniversary of the Yellowhead Nature Society - Road Allowance Project. This project was initiated at the annual meeting of the Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Assoc. held in Saltcoats in Feb. of 2022. Working under the Yellowhead Nature Society banner the committee focused on the preservation of road allowances within individual rural municipalities. In the summer 2022 and with the permission of the Rural Municipality of Saltcoats signs were installed on designated roads that have natural habitat that allows wildlife to flourish.

### Rough-legged Hawk (Buteo lagopus)



Photo: eBird s34193291

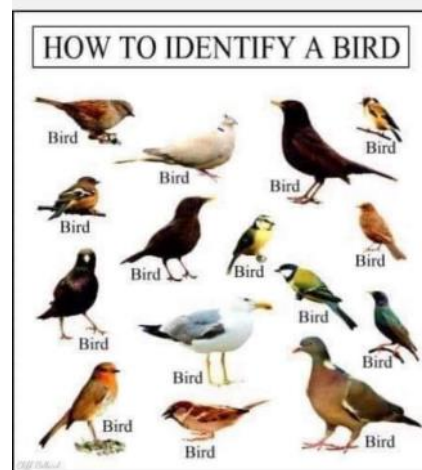
The signs are an invitation to drive or walk and enjoy the many natural wonders within that environment. A recent drive revealed two Rough-legged Hawks surveying a quarter section of grassland. One perched on the East tower the other on the North tower both patiently waiting, waiting for a rustle in the grass.

This project would not have succeeded without the financial support of the Yellowhead Flyway Birding Trail Assoc. and the voluntary donations to the Road Allowance Project.

To honour the commitment of the Rural Municipalities of Saltcoats, Orkney, Cana and Wallace to this project we have nominated each R.M. for a Saskatchewan Municipal Environmental Award.

Such an award would be well deserved and we thank you

### How to Identify a Bird



Submitted by Kathleen Pitt  
Kelsey Nature Society

### What's New on YFBTA Website?

Historic Fact: Some of the land surrounding Anderson Lake was designated as a Game Preserve in 1949. Check our website (yfbta.com) for a write-up submitted by Jim Oliver to the *Saltcoats Root and Branches* publication (pp. 229 and 230).

I recommend that you check out *Collective Nouns in the Animal Kingdom* (Vol.44 No.5; taken from the May-June 2022 newsletter of the Saskatoon Nature Society and written by president Jim Lee).

Morley Maier has shared a photograph of the released Fisher (*Martes pennanti*) that has been raiding his bird feeder.



## The Value of Shelterbelts

William Schroeder

Recently I was in a rural coffee shop and the discussion, as it often does, turned to farming. This morning the topic was how technology along with monstrous equipment were leading the way to farm profitability. Most agreed farming had changed and the change was good. Someone chirped, “but what about the shelterbelts, you know for the birds, bees and flowers”. So what about the shelterbelts, are they still important, do they have value?

What is the value of a shelterbelt or hedgerow? The use of shelterbelts has evolved with the needs of prairie farmers. Today, trees on farms are mainly planted for the same reasons they were 100 years ago, to protect and beautify the farm yard. Today, few shelterbelts are being planted in fields as the perception exists that trees are not needed there and in fact create more problems than they are worth. In fact many shelterbelts and hedgerows are being removed. Changes in land tenure and farm size as well as the drive for efficiency and profitability have dulled the recognition that shelterbelts are important.



The greatest but least understood value of shelterbelts and trees is what they do for nature. Providing habitat for plants, beneficial insects, pollinators, birds and mammals is important. In addition, strategically placed trees protect aquatic habitats by preventing agricultural nutrients and sediments from degrading water quality. Concerns about climate change and greenhouse gas emissions have resulted in a new look at shelterbelts as a way to capture carbon on the farm.

At the next coffee shop debate on the value of trees. Consider: what about the trees, bees and flowers!

## Protecting road allowances and other field—border habitats in Saskatchewan

Joseph K. Schmutz

Road allowances are similar to other non-crop field edges at permanent and semi-permanent ponds, low saline areas, aspen bluffs and shelterbelts. These are finally getting the research attention they deserve. The messages that emerge are that these small patches of native habitat support plant, animal and microbe communities that struggle or are unable to exist in fields. Here periodic bare soil, chemical and fertilizer use, and soil compaction are unfavourable. Especially between harvest and the next growing season, soil building organisms get to work and encourage crop residue decomposition with bacteria neutralizing and preventing agrochemicals from building up to harmful levels.

Research by L.H. Nguyen and others in 2022 (in *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*) showed that agricultural landscapes mixed with native habitat patches had higher mean Canola yields than uniform fields. At the fields level, yield was elevated up to 30 and sometimes 100 m from native habitat edges.

On the biodiversity side, R.L. Stanton and others in 2018, also published in *Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment*, examined Breeding Bird Survey data and found that 74% of farm-land associated species decreased between 1966 and 2013.

The pressures are intense and our collective response is urgently need. The United Nations 15<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties calls for transformative engagement in our collective response to the joint crises, biodiversity and sustainability. The Working Group concluded that “... scientific documents provide ample evidence that, despite ongoing efforts, biodiversity is deteriorating world-wide at rates unprecedented in human history.” Addressing the biodiversity crisis, they say, will require unprecedented transformation by a fully engaged citizenry.

The project partners shown above are such an engaged citizenry. When we drive through the prairie landscapes and see erosion-resisting grassy strips in fields, ponds and low areas left intact to restore ground water, functioning shelterbelt and patches of native trees and shrubs area, these farms are our allies. We should enlist their help in finding a successful way forward.

## Fungi in the Ecosystem

Jim Smith

Fungi have their own Kingdom like plants and animals do. The classification of life gets somewhat messy as some minute organisms don't seem to fit very well but plants, animals and fungi are the easiest to group. It's estimated that there are 2-4 million species of fungi including slime molds, yeasts, mycorrhizal fungi (that function for plants like root hairs) and mushrooms. Fungi have chitin in their cells which is like the fungal equivalent of cellulose. The fungal kingdom is large and not well understood. Fungi cannot produce food like plants do but rely on associations with plants for nutrition.

There are three main roles that fungi play these being decomposers, cooperators and parasites. White thread like fibers that you see on rotting wood are mycelium of decomposing fungi. Mycorrhizal fungi grow in the root system of plants and dramatically enhance nutrient absorption in exchange for carbohydrates. Parasitic fungi attack living plants and sometimes other fungi. Mushrooms are the macroscopic fruiting bodies of a mycelium and those that produce them are the most understood fungi. Approximately 140,000 mushrooms have been identified (lots to learn).



Running Club Moss (*Lycopodium clavatum*)

Plants needed to team up with fungi to be able to colonize the primordial earth. Fungi were able to secrete enzymes that were able to breakdown the primordial rock (no soil back then) and unlock nutrients that the plants that the plants, originally algae, could use with their photosynthetic abilities.

Plants produced more sugars than they use and shared the excess with fungi. This is a relationship that endures to this day.

Interestingly, the two photos are of a mushroom and another of a plant. Scale up to 30 m and you have a bit of an idea of what the early pioneering organisms might have looked like. Lycopodium forests, thanks to association with fungi, changed the earth.



Strap Shaped Pestel  
(*Clavariadelphus sachalinensis*)

The mushroom producing fungi form two groups. Basidiomycota and Ascomycota. The difference is in the way the spores are arranged. It's pretty techy. The latter is a smaller group that includes morels.

Certainly, the main interests taken in mushrooms are due to their culinary attributes. Some are downright delicious and some are downright deadly. Novel mushrooms are not to be fooled with. You need to be absolutely certain about ingesting before eating mushrooms. The wisdom of elders is a decent source of information. These folks became elders by not eating the wrong mushrooms.

### Note: On the YFBTA website you can view:

Published newsletters: 2004 - 2023

Loon Initiative reports: 2009—2023



## Saltcoats Xmas Bird Count: a summary

YFBTA member Arden Bradford

The Dec. 18, 2022 bird count was a very cold day and the birds counted that day would be the lowest number of birds we have counted in the last several years. This year on Dec. 18 we were enjoying a warm spell brought on by the strong "El Nino" weather pattern and as a result we had a 1000 individual increase over 2022.

There were 26 species and 1770 individuals identified by our backyard feeder watchers and our volunteer drivers who were able to drive 100's of kilometres of country roads - usually inaccessible at this time of year. The large number of individual birds counted that day can be attributed to the large flocks of Snow Buntings, Red Polls and, this year, the large number of sparrows that were identified.

The bird counters also counted Pine Siskins (in a well protected yard), one Pine Grosbeak, flocks of Bohemian and Cedar Waxwings (on apple and other fruit trees). Of interest, there were three Horned Owls, eight Bald Eagles, two Rough-legged Hawks and three Pileated Woodpeckers. Gray Partridges in larger than usual numbers but only a couple of Sharp-tailed Grouse.

Our bird count area is limited to North of Saltcoats following the Yellowhead Highway to South of Bredenbury. The Eastern boundary is the R.M. of Churchbridge (Range Road 210) and the Western boundary is the Peachview Road West of Saltcoats (Range Road 2023). We are limited to a 15 mile diameter from a central point and we are at our allowed limit.

Because of proximity we do try to avoid counting the same birds twice. This year we had sixteen yard and feeder watchers and three volunteers who drove roads in the surrounding countryside.

Arden and Donna Bradford and Ron and Gerri Knudsen thank you for your participation Dec. 18, 2023. We are looking forward to continued participation in our Christmas Bird Count planned for Dec. 18, 2024.

*2024 marks 75th Anniversary for Nature Saskatchewan (taken from Nature Saskatchewan publication)*

As Nature Saskatchewan grows, so does its capacity for programming and outreach. As of 2023, 1 045 participants are voluntarily conserving over 922 000 acres (373 330 hectares of grassland habitat and 141 miles (227 km) of shoreline habitat for wildlife and plants across southern Saskatchewan.

## Red-bellied Woodpecker: *Melanerpes erythrocephalus*

Gloria and Dave Herron

One day, in the middle of October, three Red-bellied Woodpeckers flew into our farmyard at Bredenbury, Saskatchewan. Two of them departed after a couple of days but the third one, a female, stayed and is still with us at the time of writing.



Photo: Gloria Herron

At first, she was very shy but she seemed to become used to the feeder and now appears very comfortable.

These days she is the boss of out bird feeders. The other birds appear to respect her. She has made herself at home.

### *When in Nature: Be Prepared to Be Surprised*

Stephen Farquharson: Monday, January 22, I saw a Fisher (*Martes pennanti*). It went up a tree. I had a good long look. It was along the road that runs along the western shore of Anderson Lake.

Morley Maier: This Fisher was discovered by Morley Maier when he checked the live trap that he had put out the previous evening in an attempt to thwart theft of bird seeds and suet from his feeder. Morley believed the thief to be a raccoon. The Fisher, fortunate to deal with Morley, was released it into a nearby wetland area.

## Anna's

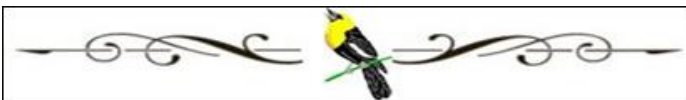
YFBTA member Don Weidl

It was a beautiful warm Sunday morning at 11:30 a.m. on October 1, 2017; temperatures reached an unusual +21C later that day. I was enjoying a coffee on my deck in Broadview with a friend from White Rock, B.C and my brother-in-law when I saw a hummingbird flitting beside some brightly coloured garden decorations on the side of my shed.



Anna's Hummingbird  
Photo: Don Weidl

Since the last female Ruby-throated Hummingbird was seen at my feeder on August 31, the sight of this hummingbird sparked a bit of interest in me, although my guests were not all that excited. I had not filled my hummingbird feeder for over a month; however, it still was hanging about 5 m from where we were sitting. The hummingbird made a beeline for the feeder where I saw a glint of a red speckled gorget. The bird then called, and I became even more excited because this call was not the familiar call of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird. The bird then flew away, and I was left wondering what species of hummingbird this was. Some research solved the mystery - it was *Calypte anna*.



## Are You Interested in an Advocacy?

Taken from a Nature Sask. e-newsletter

Consider what wetlands, sloughs, etc. do for the environment and for us. In short, they act as filters to keep water supplies clean and healthy. They protect from flooding, drought and erosion. They support wildlife by providing habitat. They sequester carbon.

The drainage and channeling of these natural wetlands occurs to increase crop production. But water must go somewhere and by damaging or removing these natural systems producers downstream may be left with flooded lands or perhaps not enough moisture to support their own, once healthy, lands.

Obviously, this can cause disputes among neighbours and cause communities to struggle. We also need to keep in mind the environmental impact that drainage has on local species and waterways.



Photo: submitted by YFBTA member Betty Malo

Currently, Saskatchewan **DOES NOT** have a Wetland Policy in place. **The only province in the country without one.**

### How can you help?

Contact your MLA and the Saskatchewan Minister of Environment and let them know that your personal viewpoint.

## Doug Welyholowa Honoured by Nature Saskatchewan

First published in the *Blue Jay* (2023 Winter Issue)

In 2005, Doug Welykholowa joined the Loon Initiatives Committee (LIC), bringing dedication and energy to the table. He possesses a set of skills, and a passion, which he voluntarily continues to contribute to the LIC. Initially, Doug assisted with monitoring, recording and reporting. He donated use of his watercraft and associated expenses to this YFBTA project. Within a short while he was asked to assume responsibilities for the LIC as the partnership's chairperson.

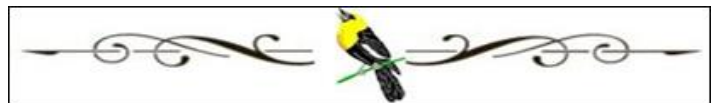
Each year, he strengthened the "loon work" by reaching out to park administrators. He also developed forms to record observations and reports, collecting and saving them to assist with an annual report requested by the Canadian Lakes Loon Survey, a federal group working within Birds Canada. He has contributed articles to YFBTA's newsletter and to Nature Saskatchewan's *Blue Jay* magazine.

Doug is a superb organizer and he can be a strong advocate. He is enthusiastic and persistent. He is also a skilled artist (one can gain a sense of this talent when examining the maps of the loon territories that are part of his annual reports). He has also produced educational materials that have been used in the park administration office.

Doug applied for financial support to the Saskatchewan Wildlife Federation, with funds used to develop brochures and lakefront signage currently in use in the park. He also successfully appealed to the Madge Lake Cabin Owners' Association to join the citizen science group. He has assisted with deploying buoys marking loon territories and assisted with the installation of the signage.

Recipients of Nature Saskatchewan's Conservation Award are advocates. There should be evidence of meritorious work. It is expected that a recipient has displayed an outstanding contribution to conservation over a period of years. Doug's work "ticks every box". He continues to work within YFBTA and continues as chairperson of the LIC.

**Editor's note:** In 2023 at Nature Saskatchewan's Fall Meet in Indian Head, Stan Shadick and Doug were recipients of prestigious Conservation Awards. Doug's annual reports can be viewed on the YFBTA website ([yfbta.com](http://yfbta.com)).



### What's Flying Around: Newsletter Group Volunteers

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